

Texts: Deut. 5:12-15; Matthew 11:28-30

Subject: Sabbath

Theme: Sabbath: Faithful Rest

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost; August 18, 2019, Reformation Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV

Grace and peace to you from God our father in heaven and the Lord Jesus,
Amen.

Some weeks are just tougher than others. I hope your week was easy, but this first week of school was something like we haven't experienced in our house in a long time. Lily is dialed in - she's doing great already at 7th grade. Isaac is in 4th grade now, and starting school online. Elise is beginning the first grade. As homeschoolers we usually take it pretty easy, but with my wife getting ready to go back to school too, we wanted to give them some more structure and resources for learning. So, we are learning with them. About the online live lessons with the teachers, the reading and math with videos and worksheets online, the art classes and science and history too! The technology is something we all have to learn, and of course, we have a three year old who needs lots of attention too. Then the pipes clogged. The water (and more) rushed up through the master bedroom shower. The 60-year old house needs attention, and after cameras, snakes, and plungers, it took three plumbers, and much weeping and gnashing of teeth to solve the problem. We had TaeKwonDo belt testing, a birthday party, work and meetings, visits, and calls to make. But we made it to Sunday. This day we get to rest. Right? I hope so.

Our bodies need rest, our minds and hearts need to rest too. It's how we're made. The heart beats and rest between each beat. The lungs take in air and rest between inhale and exhale. The waves in the ocean move in a rhythm, they come in sets, not all at once. Why is it so hard for us human beings to find rest? We pray for

rest, we lament our busy lives, and we wonder when we will be able to finally get some rest. I don't think it's unique that even when I rest, I think I should be doing something. I'm plugged in. My phone is always nearby. If I'm not working, I'm scrolling and clicking, to see how others are resting.

Rest is important. It is important to God.

So important, that it's the third commandment. Rest is a part of the creation story - more on that next week - it's handed down to Moses when he received the ten commandments, the law for all of Israel. Today, we hear the word from Deuteronomy. Moses is reminding the people of the law, before entering the promised land. Moses reminds the people about everything God has done for the people, and the promises God has made, but not without reminding them of the covenant, the laws given to the Jewish people, for them to obey that they would be blessed in the land the Lord was giving to them. Rest is number three out of ten. That's pretty high up on the list.

God commanded rest. Moses reminds the people of the need for rest, according to God's command, but also for the sake of the community. In this new land they are going into, things are going to be different. It's not like in Egypt where they had to work constantly, at the expense of their bodies of the sake of the empire. The land suffered, the animals were used up, and the people were made to be miserable. No - in this new place there will be rest for weary bodies, but also for families, animals, servants, visitors, even those from foreign lands. They all get to be at rest together. The day of rest commanded by God was for the sake of the community, that all would come together to be renewed, to reflect on God's goodness, and to be reminded of the deliverance God had given them in this new land.

How do you find rest? Do you think our culture values rest?

[time for discussion]

So often, we greet each other, and ask, “How are you? How have you been? What have you been doing?” With emphasis on the *doing*. Blogger and author Steve Wiens writes that you might get a strange look if we answered, “*You know, I have a lot of spare time. I’m taking a lot of naps. Catching up on Parks and Recreation.*”¹ We’ve been taught from an early age that we better get busy! It’s part of the story of America, but it was brought here by those who valued work as a sign of God’s approval. You’ve heard the term, “protestant work ethic.” That’s us. This idea came out of a theology that those who worked hard and lived a frugal life were chosen by God. We don’t think that here, but the idea is part of American existence.

Wayne Muller writes in the introduction to his book, *Sabbath*,
A successful life has become a violent enterprise. We make war on our own bodies, pushing them beyond their limits; war on our children, because we cannot find enough time to be with them when they are hurt and afraid, and need our company; war on our spirit, because we are too preoccupied to listen to the quiet voices that seek to nourish and refresh us; war on our communities, because we are fearfully protecting what we have and do not feel safe enough to be kind and generous; war on the earth because we cannot take the time to place our feet on the ground and allow it to feel us, to taste its blessings and give thanks.

Does that sound like life in Las Vegas in 2019? What are we doing? I’ve been watching and re-watching Avengers: Endgame the last couple of weeks, and one scene

¹ Steve Wiens, “What BuSy Means” <https://stevewiens.com/2013/05/02/what-busy-means/>

I love (there are many) is when Tony Stark and Pepper Potts are talking late one night, [spoiler alert] after Tony has just figured out time-travel. He offers that he could just stop and not go any deeper into it, in an effort to just stay home and not set right the wrongs of intergalactic genocide. She asks him, “but would you be able to rest?” There is always more work to be done. Even when we stop working, we can find things to occupy our time, and so often our minds are thinking of the next thing on the list.

How can we reconnect with who we truly are and also be reminded *whose* we are? Can you imagine how being busy all the time not only is counter productive to our own well being, but to others? To children? To our community? To the earth? For our own sake, for our spirits, for the sake of others, we have got to stop. Pastors hear it all the time, how are you doing with self-care? Most of us laugh. All of us fall victim to this, but those in helping professions are especially prone to overdo it. Social workers, nurses and doctors, chaplains, pastors, and above all - teachers and parents are vulnerable to exhaustion. Thomas Merton writes, “To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to violence.”²

We need rest. But we need more than that.

Martin Luther teaches that following the law, just to satisfy a requirement is not the point. As followers of Jesus, we are to take every opportunity to hear the word, to gather to worship God, to sing, to pray, and to be together as the body of Christ. We ought to do it every day, but for the sake of good order and knowing that people do have

² Merton, Thomas, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York: Random House, 1968)

work to do, we take the first day of the week, Sunday to be our day to worship, to hear the word. But we need more than that.

Luther teaches that we should not come just to hear the word and leave, but to truly take it in, to be transformed by the word, to learn and know the word, that it would be in our hearts and on our lips when we go back to our work. Worship matters. It is here in this place where we hear Jesus' words to us, "take my yoke upon you, and learn from me" Jesus offers to be a teacher and example for us - and at the same time emphasizes that the way of following Jesus is different than following the way of the world. The work that Jesus calls us to is to follow the one who is gentle and humble in heart, to learn love and to find true rest. To chase after what culture calls life can wear us out. To strive for what the world sees as success can end in disaster for not only us but our neighbors. To find peace and joy in Jesus is to come to hear the word, and to take it in, to ingest it, learn it and live it. That's where we belong. We find our center in our teacher and Lord Jesus, and remember the freedom He gives us from worry about whether our efforts are enough, whether we are worthy, successful, intelligent, or powerful enough. We remember the work of the one who loved us enough to die on a cross for us, whose work was enough that we could be a new creation, and that frees us to go and work for our neighbors. We remember that we belong to Jesus, and we belong to each other. We find our rest in him. Then when we go back to our work, we will know that God's love in Jesus is with us whether we work or rest, and we can pass on that word of grace to others.

Amen.